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1

## CONSPIRACY THEORIES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA



PETER KNIGHT, EDITOR

# Conspiracy Theories in American History

An Encyclopedia

Volume 1  
A–L

Edited by  
Peter Knight

Associate Editors  
Robert Alan Goldberg  
Jeffrey L. Pasley  
Larry Schweikart

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**Brussell, Mae**

Mae Brussell was a broadcaster and influential figure in the conspiracy research community that began to emerge after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. She was born in Beverly Hills in 1922, the daughter of a prominent Los Angeles rabbi and granddaughter of the founder of the I. Magnin department stores. Brussell lived as an affluent housewife with five children, until the shooting of alleged Kennedy assassin Lee Harvey Oswald live on television prompted her into investigating the assassination. She quickly became dissatisfied with the official government conclusion that the murder had been the work of a lone assassin. She began reading and cross-referencing the complete 26-volume report of the Warren Commission, and started amassing a large collection of newspaper clippings, articles, and books relating to what she came to believe was a vast conspiracy that since World War II has been turning the United States into a fascist regime. Her argument was partly based on information that was emerging at the time about "Operation Paperclip," the U.S. government's wartime plan to rescue Nazi rocket scientists after World War II, but its conclusions went well beyond the commonly established facts. Brussell presented her ideas on a weekly radio show, *Dialogue: Conspiracy* (later called *World Watchers International*), on KLRB, a local station in Carmel, California, her new home. During the 1970s and 1980s she wrote much-discussed

articles outlining her thesis in, for example, Paul Krassner's countercultural magazine, *The Realist*, and *Hustler* editor Larry Flynt's new venture, *Rebel* magazine ("The Nazi Connection to the John F. Kennedy Assassination"). In 1983 Brussell's radio show moved to KAZU in Pacific Grove, California, where she continued until her death from cancer in 1988. In keeping with her theory of a wide-reaching conspiracy within the U.S. establishment, Brussell speculated that her cancer had been induced by the CIA, but no evidence ever emerged. After her death various factions within the assassination research community sought to establish a permanent archive of Brussell's writings, notes, and clippings (which began to take on a legendary status), but to date there is only a limited website.

Peter Knight

**See also:** Kennedy, John F., Assassination of; Warren Commission Report.

**Reference**

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**Website**

Mae Brussel: <http://www.maebrussell.com>.

## Bryan, William Jennings

An eloquent speaker of Populist tendencies, William Jennings Bryan (D-NE) delivered one of the most famous conspiracy speeches of all time to the Democratic convention in 1896 when he warned big business and those favoring the gold standard, "You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold." Bryan lost the presidential contest to the advocate of the gold standard, Republican William McKinley, essentially ending the bimetallism debate in the United States that had characterized the Progressive era and served as a unifying point for the Populist Party.

Bryan was born in Salem, Illinois, studied law at Union College of Law, and practiced in Jacksonville, Illinois, before moving to Lincoln, Nebraska. There, he became active in Democratic Party politics and

by the 1890s joined the free silver movement that sought to force the federal government to purchase western silver at inflated prices to expand the money supply. He won election to Congress in 1890, but in 1894 was defeated in his Senate campaign. At the Democratic convention, where Bryan became a political star, he was one of several pro-silver voices, but clearly the most theatrical. He had honed his oratorical skills by a series of speaking tours and Chatauqua lectures, and even in defeat to McKinley, Bryan remained the undisputed leader of the Democratic Party.

Like other silver advocates, Bryan thought a conspiracy of Wall Street bankers and easterners had forced the gold standard upon debtors to increase in real terms the amount they repaid. In addition, however, antisemitism was widespread in the Populist Party, from which Bryan drew much of his support. Concerns over "Jewish moneyed interests" in New York had aligned many antisemites against the gold standard, and Bryan used what some conspiracy theorists see as coded language to speak to those concerns.

In foreign affairs, however, Bryan toed the anti-conspiracy line as an anti-imperialist, resisting U.S. intervention in Cuba. (Even then, his position did not please some Populist supporters, who thought he could have done more. Therefore, in L. Frank Baum's *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* [1900], which is widely viewed as a parable on Populism, most analysts see the Cowardly Lion as representing Bryan.) Bryan's oratory and his grass-roots support kept him a perennial candidate for the presidency, which he lost to McKinley again in 1900, and to Taft in 1908.

By 1912, a new political star in the Democratic Party had risen, Woodrow Wilson, and at the convention that year, Bryan threw his support behind him. Partly as a reward, Bryan received an appointment as Secretary of State in the Wilson administration. Given Bryan's support for easy money policies, which were viewed as a response to one conspiracy, it is ironic that he joined an administration that presided over the creation of the Federal Reserve Board, which was criticized by conspiracy